

The following is a copy of the presentation Jim Kerr gave before the Fort Vance Historical Society on May 24.

RACCOON CHURCH

Raccoon Church is an appropriate place for a meeting of the Fort Vance Historical Society for many reasons.

(1) Joseph Patterson, first pastor of the church, resided for a while in the Cross Creek district and attended religious meetings held in Fort Vance.

(2) Cross Creek Church had Fort Vance and Raccoon Church had Fort Beelor.

(3) This church building is 100 years old this year. It is the third successive replacement on the same location of a church building which stood here when both Fort Vance and Fort Beelor were serving their purpose.

(4) There are families in Raccoon Church by the names of Aten, Matchett, and Wallace whose lineage goes back to victims of Indian savagery; some of the victims were made captive and the others were slain.

(5) There are graves, probably eight in number, unmarked and unidentified, in the graveyard at the side of the church, of men who were slain by Indians.

These facts are ties with the past in which you, the members of Fort Vance Historical Society, are interested. We are glad you are here.

As has been said, this building is 100 years old this year. The former building was razed in the spring of 1872 and this building was dedicated free from debt on Thanksgiving of 1873.

The cost of the building was \$16,000.00.

The tablet in the front gable is inscribed: "Raccoon Church, built A. D. 1781, Rebuilt A. D. 1785, A. D. 1830, A. D. 1872."

The church bell is inscribed: "Cast by A. Fulton, Pittsburgh, Pa. for Raccoon Church.

The original stained glass of the windows was imported from London, England. It was recently discarded and other glass installed.

The pulpit furniture and the pews are the originals.

The chandeliers, and oil lamps, now wired for electricity, are the originals.

The tablet to the west of the pulpit was erected in 1932 in memory of The Reverend Joseph Patterson, 1752-1832, First Presbyterian Minister ordained west of the Alleghenies, Pastor of Raccoon Church 1789-1816. The ordination took place here preceding Mr. Patterson's installation as pastor.

The tablet to the east of the pulpit commemorates the meeting of the Presbytery here on June 14, 1921, the fiftieth anniversary of the pastorate of the Rev. Greer M. Kerr.

The pipe and reed organ in the rear loft was obtained in 1906 for \$1,500.00, $\frac{1}{2}$ of which was paid by Andrew Carnegie under a general offer made by him to any church raising the other half.

The Hammond organ in the front loft was presented to the church in 1960 by James McElroy Rea in memory of his wife, the late Cynthia Russell Rea.

The oldest reference to this church is found in the diary of the Rev. John McMillian, an early missionary to western Pa. He recorded in this diary that he preached at Raccoon on the first Sabbath of December, 1778 and at Mr. Bailer's (Beelor's) place on Raccoon on the Tuesday after the third Sabbath of June, 1779. So, the beginning of this church occurred not later than the year 1778. Meetings were held occasionally after this date until April 21, 1789. when the Rev.

Joseph Patterson became the joint pastor of Raccoon and Montour. After ten years, Mr. Patterson resigned at Montour and continued at Raccoon

The Rev. Joseph Patterson was the first pastor of this church (1789-1816). He was born on March 20, 1752 in County Down, Ireland. At the age of 25 years, he married Jane Moak and the couple emigrated to America. He taught school in or near Philadelphia for a while and then became an enlisted soldier in the Army of the Revolution. He retired from the service in 1777 and moved to York County, Pa. In 1779 he moved again and settled on a farm in the Cross Creek neighborhood. There, he attended religious services which at the time were held in Fort Vance. He was an elder of Cross Creek Church. Comparatively late in life he decided to become a minister of the Presbyterian Church. He completed his training and was ordained and installed here on Nov. 11, 1789. This was a momentous occasion for the Presbyterian Church. The ordination was the first to take place west of the Allegheny Mountains. Mr. Patterson's pastorate continued until October 16, 1816, when he resigned because of physical infirmities. He retired to Pittsburgh, where he died on February 24, 1832 and was buried.

Mr. Patterson was a vigorous and able man. He was probably the most prominent man who ever lived in this community.

Moses Allen was the second pastor (1817-1838)

He was a man who loved the law of the Church. He believed the supreme judge was always on the bench and the court always in session, judging all that was done and pronouncing judgments of reward or punishment as suited each occasion. Under his charge, the church grew in strength and numbers.

Clement V. McKaig was the third pastor (1841-1865).

He was a peace loving man and guided the congregation through the period of the Civil War in paths of harmony.

For a five year period, the church was without a pastor.

Greer M. Kerr was the fourth pastor (1871-1930).

He wondered at times if he was doing right by staying on during his old age, but the continuance of regular services over the 42 years since his passing indicates no mistake was made. He was a student of theology but believed the message of the Gospel was clear and plain and should not be allowed to become complex. His last sermon, delivered in the 87th year of his age and on the last Sabbath of his life was entitled "The Advice of an Old Man" and the text was taken from Ecclesiastes 12:13; "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Mr. Kerr's pastorate was the last of the long ones. The Patterson, Allen, McKraig, and Kerr terms of service embraced a total of 140 years. Since Mr. Kerr's time there have been four ordained pastors, and nine student pastors. Their names and periods of service are as follows:

- George W. Kiehl--1931
- Rev. H. Arthur Mosser--1931-37
- James P. Shaw--1938-39
- Rev. George H. Bucher--1940-44
- Rev. J. Calvin French--1944-49
- A. Cecil Casper--1949-51

- David A. Haines--1951-54
- Eugene S. Boyd--1954-57
- John Allen Shearer--1958-61
- Rev. T. Clifford Hay--1961-65
- Bertrand C. Pitchford--1966-68
- W. Leroy Beckes--1968-71
- Kenneth B. Calebaugh--1971-

The congregation has been happy with all these pastors and all of the student pastors who have gone on to other fields have found successful ministries.

CANDOR

Not much has been written of Fort Beelor and not much spoken of it to the knowledge of anyone now living in the community. Any person asking a question concerning it was usually referred to Crumrine's History of Washington County, Pa. The Crumrine account has been generally accepted as being the most full and accurate on the subject. According to this account, the home of Capt. Samuel Beelor was what was known as the fort, and the fort was located about 100 yards southwestwardly from the church. Land title records and the locations of known log houses substantially support these two findings. The main items of title are a survey and deed from the State of Virginia and four later deeds from the State of Pennsylvania.

Capt. Samuel Beelor and his son, Samuel, Jr., settled in 1774 and laid claim to a tract of land containing 1400 acres. They believed that the State of Virginia extended northwardly to the Ohio River and they applied to that state for a grant. In 1782, Virginia authorities made a survey of 804 acres of the 1400, and in 1785, the state, acting by Patrick Henry, Governor, made a deed to Samuel Beelor for the land surveyed. The land described in the deed extended from the stream below the present home of Neal S. and Kathryn C. Matchett northwardly to Bailey's Run, just across from the recently constructed trailer village.

When it developed that the Captain had gotten his deed from the wrong state, he and his son applied to Pennsylvania for good title. They succeeded in acquiring 554 acres of the original 1400 in two parcels; one of 400 acres called "Big Levels" and one of 154 acres called "Springfield."

The Beelors soon had two neighbors, Alexander and John Dunlap. John settled on land to the northwest called "The Purchase" and Alexander on land to the southwest called "Beautiful."

All four original tracts came together at a common corner, and four log houses were built near it; two on Beelor land and two on Dunlap land. Clustered around a central point as these homes were, none would be a lonely cabin solely dependent on its members for protection. Each of the homes would have three others on quick call for help.

The Crumrine conclusion that the fort was the Beelor home was based on the fact that the copy of the 1782 survey which was attached to the Beelor Virginia deed showed one building only, a large one. All copies of surveys at that time were drawn by hand. No two copies would be exactly alike. There would be variances according to the style and interests of the artist. An omission of detail, now and then, would be expectable. Miss Kathrine A. Pyle, when researching Fort Dillow for your recent tour of that place, obtained a photocopy of the 1782 survey on record in the State Library of Virginia in Richmond. This copy, which is the official one, shows two buildings; the large one to which Crumrine refers and a small one.

The location of the large building shown on the survey is approximately that of the present church building. This building, according to church history, is located on the same site of the first one, and the first one was built a year before the survey was made. Crumrine was misled by incomplete information into believing that the church was the home. However his conclusion that the home was the fort remains as valid as if the official copy had shown one building only. It shows one building only other than the church.

There is no story that the fort was a stockade. There is no story that it was ever attacked. The stories are of people seeking safety and shelter. A church history relates that the first burial in the graveyard was probably that of a little girl who died in

Fort Beelor while her family was there for safety. A family history of Samuel Merchant relates that his wife and child stayed at Fort Beelor in 1778 while he worked on his tomahawk claim near the present site of Bavington. A family history of John and Martha Tavern Noble McDonald relates that in 1779 they went to Fort Beelor for safety at the time of the birth of their twin sons, Andrew and William. These reports suggest that Fort Beelor was more a place of refuge in times of stress and trouble than a place of security against attack. They call to mind a place of companionship and neighborly aid such as are to be found in a home.

The second Crumrine conclusion, that the home was about 100 yards from the church, southwestwardly, was based on legend. This is strongly supported by the Virginia record of the 1782 survey and by other circumstances. The location designated by the survey scales about 100 yards from the church, although the direction is slightly southeastwardly instead of south westwardly. This location also conforms to the manner in which title was acquired from Pennsylvania. The site is within Springfield, a tract acquired through "settlement." This method required an established residence. The site of the church is within Big Levels, a tract acquired through "grainrights." This method had no requirement of residence. Also, the site is just above an old spring, an ideal place for a settler's cabin. Moreover, the uncovering of some old foundation stones and a map of Candor in Caldwell's Atlas of Washington County, Pa. (1876) prove that a building was once there. And, the deed records not only prove that a building was there but also that it was a large one.

William Clark was a successor in title to Samuel Beelor of the land on which this building stood. He, William, divided the building into separate ownerships by two deeds. These deeds were made on Jan. 9, 1839, one to William Conley and one to Rebecca Conley. The deed to William conveyed the northeasterly half of the house with its adjacent land. The dividing line between the two lots was described in the deed to William as "thence through the center of the house north fifty-six and one-half degrees west four and nine-tenths perches" and in the deed to Rebecca as "thence through the center of the house south fifty-six and one-half degrees east four and nine-tenths perches." This Conley line can be easily established today. It has been carried down through deeds and is now a boundary line between the parsonage lot and a lot which separates it and a spring lot.

All known indications are that Samuel Beelor's home was what became known as Fort Beelor and that it was located centrally somewhere along this later established boundary line of four and nine-tenths perches in length.

The ownership of land of the settlement of Fort Beelor by the Beelors and the Dunlaps continued for a period of about 15 years. Then, in 1789-1790, the Beelors sold to James Clark and his son, John. In the early eighteen hundreds, the Dunlaps also sold to the Clarks, and the Clarks were the owners of the whole place.

The first sale of a residential lot in what was to become the village of Candor was made in 1834, and the village flourished. It was full of enterprise. A general store and post office stood on the southwest corner of the intersection of the Midway and Bulger roads. Across the road southeastwardly were the tailor and millinery shops. Across the road from the store northeastwardly were the doctor's home and office. Below the office was another general store. Below this store was the blacksmith shop with its shading apple and locust trees. Across the road was a barbershop. Beyond it was the wagon-maker shop, and, near-by downstream was a grain mill. Also, over

the hill on McKraig's farm was an academy. Candor was a metropolis, a business center for a large community.

The post-Civil War period brought developments which changed the whole economic pattern of the district. The Pittsburgh and Steubenville Railroad was built to the south in the valley of Robinson Run. Coal cropped in this valley at levels permitting drift mining and mines opened. Oil was discovered in outlying fields. Farm prices dropped from their war time highs. The prosperity of the village diminished, as did the population of Candor. In 1870, the population of Candor was 210. in 1900, the number was 85. Since that time it has held fairly steady.

A stranger passing through may wonder why the village and the church were built so far away from town and city. To anyone who knows the place, the answer is no mystery. Almost 200 years ago, Fort Beeler made a place of refuge from the tumult of the world, and Raccoon Church made it a place of praise and worship. These characteristics have endured down through the years and are part and parcel of the place today.

We hope your visit here has been pleasant and will be found to have given you moments of empathy with the pioneers and their successors who did their part in bringing civilization to western Pennsylvania.